

# HOUR GLASS

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## Cool Tech: Amazon Echo and Google Home

The holidays are over, and many people find themselves with cool new gadgets.

GLASS does not endorse any particular product, but we're encouraged by new technologies that are created with accessibility in mind and that may be useful for our patrons.

Notably, there are several devices with voice assistants on the market. Amazon has their Echo devices, and Google made their line of Google Home items. These voice assistants are meant to interact with several internet-connected gadgets, which are called "smart" devices. They have some neat functionality even without smart devices to work with.

You have to have a smartphone or tablet to set up the Echo or the Home. During setup you will connect the device to your wireless network using

an app. Amazon products have to be set up with their Alexa app, which can also be used to connect other apps like those for Uber or Pandora. Google Home's app is, appropriately enough, called "Google Home" and works in a similar way to the Alexa app. Don't worry, both of their apps are accessible with VoiceOver or TalkBack.



After setup you can use your voice to control it. The voice assistant for the Echo is "Alexa" while the Home wakes up when you say "OK Google" or "Hey Google." When you want to use it, wake up the assistant and then say a command or a question like "Is it cold outside?"

You can adjust the volume by running your finger over the top of either device, but it's easier to simply tell it to raise or lower the volume.

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The Echo lets you call other people who have an Echo of their own. Google Home lets you call anyone in your phone contacts. Be aware: Neither lets you make a call to 911.

The Echo and the Home can both control your environment if you have a Nest thermostat or other smart home products like some smart lights, smart plugs and some smart TVs. These items will say on the box if they're compatible with voice assistants.

Even if you don't have any smart home products, you can still use your Echo or Home for tasks around the house. The same goes if your device was set up by a friend or family member and you don't have a smartphone or tablet!

Some of our favorite voice-activated tasks are for small but helpful tasks. It's handy to ask it to set a timer for you while you are cooking. Ask it to set reminders for you so you don't miss your appointments. If you ask, it can tell you how the weather is outside, or you can ask it to read top news stories. Finally, you can entertain guests with some truly cheesy jokes by asking it to "Tell me a joke."

NFB-Newsline is coming close to connecting their app with Alexa so you can hear even more local and nationwide news. If you have an Audible account, Echo can read books that you have gotten through their paid service. Since Audible is owned by Amazon, it won't currently work with Google Home.

Neither the Amazon Echo or Google Home can directly play the BARD app to listen to talking books. This means there is not a way to set up either so you can control it with your voice.

However, you can use Echo or Google Home devices to play audio on your smartphone or tablet in order to get better, louder sound when listening to your books at home. It takes a bit of setup requiring a smartphone or tablet that has both the BARD Mobile app as well as the Alexa or the Google Home app. Contact your reader advisor if you need help with this, or you can email [glass@georgialibraries.org](mailto:glass@georgialibraries.org) for instructions.

We've just scratched the surface of the many neat things the voice assistants on Echo or Home devices can do for you. If you have one, test it out and see what you can discover!

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## Books About "Firsts"

Note: Talking books begin with DB.  
Braille titles begin with BR.

*Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* by David Haward Bain (DB50430, On Bookshare)  
Chronicles the engineering feats, the scandals and political dealings, and the lives of the movers and shakers that accomplished the feat of uniting the country by rail.

*Quest For Adventure: Ultimate Feats of Modern Exploration* by Chris Bonington (DB58563)  
Chronicles 50 years of pioneering "firsts" by land, sea and air.

*Dick Clark's The First 25 Years of Rock & Roll* (DB22627)

This year-by-year scrapbook of rock and roll events from 1955 to 1980 includes articles about the major stars and groups of each year, from Little Richard to Janis Joplin to Bruce Springsteen.

*We Could Not Fail: The First African Americans in the Space Program* by Richard Paul and Steven Moss (DB81859)

Profiles 10 African American scientists, pilots and other workers who contributed to the early development of the space program in the United States.



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